

An Exclusive Report for the Eastport City Council and the City Manager
December 7, 2022

Connecting Eastport to the National Transportation System

Introduction

In January 2023 a unique opportunity will present itself. The Federal Department of Transportation in Washington DC will announce the invitation to apply for the *Small Community Air Service Development Program* grants (SCASDP). Eastport is in a unique position to apply for this grant. This would be our second attempt (we applied in 2021) and we are no longer strangers and are known to the DOT selection committee.

The Biden administration has been pumping billions of dollars into the infrastructure legislation and the Department of Transportation has gotten a big share. The SCASDP program is designed to connect rural areas of America to the national airline grid. Along these lines, Eastport is the perfect candidate in this grant cycle. Being remotely located 2 ½ hours from the Bangor Airport which is the nearest airport hub plus being isolated with no rail, bus or sea transport connections, Eastport is the perfect candidate. Added to that is Senator Susan Collins leadership affiliation with the transportation sub committee and everything points to the timing as advantageous for Eastport to apply for this grant.

For the past three years Maine's Department of Transportation (DOT) has been working with the nationally renown aviation consultant, McFarland-Johnson to build the State's infrastructure transportation Plan. It is through my participation as a board member on the State DOT Aviation Advisory Board that we have been introduced to McFarland Johnson, who happens to be Maine's own consultant. Having flights from Eastport to Portland fits perfectly into Maine's state-wide transportation plan and has brought about DOT's overwhelming support for the Eastport project. This assistance will go a long way in presenting our grant narrative to the Federal DOT in Washington DC.

I am not a proponent for changing Eastport. I love Eastport the way it is and that is why I have chosen it to be my home. However, I would be remiss in my obligations if I didn't recognize that external conditions are changing Eastport. In this regard, I believe we need to take a leadership roll to create more job opportunities and generate more revenue streams to keep the City healthy. Please keep in mind the commuter aircraft we would be using only hold 9 passengers. They are not big jet planes bringing in hundreds of tourists. We need to keep things in perspective.

December 7, 2022

Page 2

With the disappearance of the fish and cannery plants and the downturn of cargo ships using our working port, Eastport needs to best use the resources at its disposal. Using the conclusions from the *Economic Growth and Development Study* provided in 2019 by CAMOIS 310 & Associates, they identified Eastport's natural resource as "Tourism". I believe we all can agree with the report's assessment, that if Eastport can generate more tourism, it will create more job opportunities and such events will induce young families to move here and to stay here. Having air service between Portland and Eastport will generate an increased awareness for our city's attractiveness as a tourist destination, without putting a burden on the taxpaying residents.

A most important factor for consideration is Eastport's aging population and the relationship with needed medical care. Winning this transportation grant would define many positive opportunities for Eastport residents. Discounted affordable airline tickets would connect us with several fine hospitals and medical centers in Portland along with hundreds of specialized physicians and rehabilitation specialists. We would have easy access to the kind of health care specialists that are normally reserved for residents of larger cities. For consideration, I have been told that the Northern Light Cancer Care facility in Brewer is no longer accepting new patients due to staffing shortages and budget restraints. However, Portland's cancer facilities are available, although they are a 5 hour drive by car. Commuter air service will make Portland a more convenient option not just for cancer care, but for major specialized surgeries as well. The residents of Eastport are entitled to more medical options..

The Game Plan

If the goal is to use the airport as a catalyst for creating employment opportunities and increasing local revenue by generating tourism while not putting a burden on the taxpayers, the common denominator must be using Federal Grants to obtain this objective. With this in mind, here is how the game plan has been developed.

The Portland Airport is the most appropriate choice. Connecting Eastport to the national air transportation system would allow visitors a more convenient way to arrive in Eastport than by automobile. We do not have rail lines or bus service into Eastport. Arriving by airplane is the practical answer. Portland is an international airport that connects to many American locations using major air carriers. Portland itself also has a thriving metropolitan population of Mainers who enjoy travel and would utilize the chance to visit and discover the beautiful seaside community of Eastport.

December 7, 2022

Page 3

The plan to accomplish the goal of connecting Eastport to the national air transportation grid, we have created a five step plan;

1. Obtain support from the City Council Leadership and from the City Manager for Portland as the priority destination for a connecting hub. This project cannot move forward without public support and the City Council provides that.
2. Research and hire an acclaimed and experienced aviation consultant to guide us through the complex process. McFarland Johnson has been working for the Maine DOT for the past three years building the State-wide system plan. We are fortunate to be introduced to McFarland Johnson and in hiring them for this project, we also gain the support of the State DOT because our plan is in compliance to their state-wide system plan.
3. Convince the Portland Airport to allow us to use a sterile terminal entrance for outbound Eastport passengers to disembark and pass through TSA security at Portland. This means the airplane would need to park close to a designated entrance and not at the conventional passenger gates. It relieves Eastport from having to institute expensive TSA measures.
4. Find a commuter airline capable and willing to fly the Portland-Eastport route. We have found SOUTHERN AIR a commuter airline similar to Cape Air who currently flies routes in Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Pennsylvania and New York State. More work needs to be accomplished but preliminary conversations are favorable and Southern Air has a keen interest in entering the Maine market and the Portland to Eastport route is very attractive.
5. Apply for and win a SCASDP grant award with invitations to apply to be announced in January. The decisions would be announced in the Spring and service to Eastport could commence in the summer of 2023. Winning this award is the key to the success of this proposal.

December 7, 2022

Page 4

Conclusions

Step one is currently in process with this report to the City Council and the City Manager. This plan has the approval and consent of the Airport Advisory Committee, the Airport Manager and the Airport Association, plus the support of the Maine DOT .

Step two will be achieved with the City Council's approval to hire McFarland-Johnson as the aviation consultant to guide Eastport through the described complex process. This would include McFarland negotiating with the airline, doing a ticket fare analysis, building a proposed flight schedule, supplying data and all prerequisites, writing a persuasive narrative and assembling the complete grant application. Eastport's investment would be **\$20,000**. The estimated grant award would be **\$1.1Million** if awarded.

Step three has been accomplished and Portland Airport is "all in". I am enclosing a letter from the Airport Director to this effect.

Step four applies to the commuter airline, Southern Air. An introduction has been made but serious negotiations would not take place until the City Council approves the appointment of McFarland Johnson. We are unable to use Cape Air in this venture because flights would go through Bar Harbor then to Boston and the EAS (Essential Air Service) grant money that Cape Air is currently receiving is not compatible with the SCASDP grant program. Furthermore, Cape Air does not have service to Portland.

Step five is to apply for the grant in January. Due to the work ahead assembling the data and writing the narrative, to get to the grant application stage, it is essential that we come to a resolution with the City Council now. Otherwise, we will not be able to make the grant application deadline.

Respectfully submitted,
Ron DeFilippo